

What 20 years of research on cannabis use has taught us

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Summary: In the past 20 years, recreational cannabis use has grown tremendously, becoming almost as common as tobacco use among adolescents and young adults, and so has the research evidence. A major new review sets out the latest information on the effects of cannabis use on mental and physical health.



A new article summarizes what scientists have learned over twenty years of research about marijuana use, and its health and brain consequences.

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In the past 20 years recreational cannabis use has grown tremendously, becoming almost as common as tobacco use among adolescents and young adults, and so has the research evidence. A major new review in the scientific journal *Addiction* sets out the latest information on the effects of cannabis use on mental and physical health.

The key conclusions are:

Adverse Effects of Acute Cannabis Use

- Cannabis does not produce fatal overdoses.
- Driving while cannabis-intoxicated doubles the risk of a car crash; this risk increases substantially if users are also alcohol-intoxicated.
- Cannabis use during pregnancy slightly reduces birth weight of the baby.

Adverse Effects of Chronic Cannabis Use

- Regular cannabis users can develop a dependence syndrome, the risks of which are around 1 in 10 of all cannabis users and 1 in 6 among those who start in adolescence.
 - Regular cannabis users double their risks of experiencing psychotic symptoms and disorders, especially if they have a personal or family history of psychotic disorders, and if they start using cannabis in their mid-teens.
 - Regular adolescent cannabis users have lower educational attainment than non-using peers but we don't know whether the link is causal.
 - Regular adolescent cannabis users are more likely to use other illicit drugs, but we don't know whether the link is causal.
 - Regular cannabis use that begins in adolescence and continues throughout young adulthood appears to produce intellectual impairment, but the mechanism and reversibility of the impairment is unclear.
 - Regular cannabis use in adolescence approximately doubles the risk of being diagnosed with schizophrenia or reporting psychotic symptoms in adulthood.
 - Regular cannabis smokers have a higher risk of developing chronic bronchitis.
 - Cannabis smoking by middle aged adults probably increases the risk of myocardial infarction.
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Story Source:

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Journal Reference:

1. Wayne Hall. **What has research over the past two decades revealed about the adverse health effects of recreational cannabis use?** *Addiction*, 2014; DOI: [10.1111/add.12703](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.12703)
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